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ABSTRACT

The preparation of elementary school teachers in the middle and late 19th century increasingly included city normal training schools. The city school board of Akron, Ohio, reflected this trend and established its own normal training school in 1898. This paper documents the preservice training of teachers within the city training school, the progression of the city normal school from its own teacher preparation program to university affiliation, the establishment of a teachers college, and the merging of the teacher college with Akron University. The paper shows that the preservice training of 19th-century school teachers in Akron, Ohio, progressed from teachers being awarded a diploma to teachers receiving a university degree. Akron teachers first earned diplomas through the city normal school, then progressed to attending the university Teachers College and earning a bachelor's or master's degree in elementary or secondary education. These changes, initiated by state mandates in teacher certification law, led to the creation of teacher preparatory programs administered by the city board of education and their university affiliate. Eventually, the dual administration of the teachers college by the city school board and university was dissolved, and the university assumed control over the teacher preparation program. (Contains 26 references.) (SM)

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Akron Perkins Normal School: An Institutional History, 1898-1931

The preparation of elementary school teachers in the mid and late nineteenth century were increasingly trained by city normal training schools (Herbst 1989, 4). The city school board of Akron, Ohio reflected this trend and established their own normal training school in 1898. This paper will document the pre-service training of teachers within the city training school, the progression of the city normal school from its own teacher preparation program to university affiliation, the establishment of a teachers college, and the merging of the teacher college with Akron University.

The Akron schools attempted to train their own teachers before the establishment of their normal school. One type of training was the Speciman School or Spectator School held each Saturday morning throughout the school year. A teacher was selected to work with students in an observation class. Instruction lasted approximately one and half-hours then students were dismissed. The ensuing discussion revolved around classroom methodology and pedagogy. Attendance by teachers was mandatory, but the sessions were open and attended by board members and interested members of the public (Hatton 1955, 28). Samuel Findley, superintendent of Akron schools 1868-1882, established a normal school for teacher training. Spicer School, an elementary school in Akron, was converted to a normal school where young lady high school graduates were given small salaries to teach for one year under the supervision of experienced teachers (Hatton 1955).

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Despite these efforts to better train Akron teachers, city school officials were not satisfied with the quality of their teachers. Findley previously recommended to the school board the requirement of prospective teachers to have had one year in the study of pedagogy, review of the common branches with special reference to teaching them, and to have observation and practice training experience. During the 1881/1882 school year Findley recommended the establishment of a Saturday Normal School which would utilize the more experienced teachers to attain the desired ends for qualified and effective teachers (Thirty-fourth Annual Report Akron Board of Education 1882, 50).

In June 1896 the Akron board of education received a report from the Normal Training committee which outlined the establishment of a city normal school. The report was adopted, its recommendations integrated into the Akron schools, and Akron had its normal school (Minutes of the Akron School Board 1896, 158-160).

Admission into the normal school was open to any resident graduate of the high school over eighteen years of age and under the age of twenty-one. This individual was to have a teacher's certificate from the Akron City Board of Examiners. If they failed to secure such a certificate, depending upon satisfactory reasons for this failure, were admitted into the normal school if they passed an entrance examination held by the superintendent and principal of the normal school (Ibid.).

Residents of Akron who were graduates of the high school or had successfully completed the entrance examination, which covered coursework taught in the elementary schools, were admitted free into the normal school. The admission of non-residents was dependent upon their being of like age and possessing the same satisfactory qualifications as the residents of Akron. The tuition charge at the normal school was the same amount

charged for attendance at one of Akron's high schools. After admittance, upon consent of the superintendent, the normal school student could pursue the course of instruction in more time than required. Pupils chosen as teachers in the Akron public schools were selected on the basis of their excellent work in the normal school (Ibid.).

By 1919 admission requirements had changed substantially. The rules now stipulated that all applicants must be acceptable to the principal of the normal school in scholarship, personality, health, and musical ability. Applicants could be requested to withdraw at any time. Members of the senior class were expected to give assistance in teaching when called upon by the superintendent-without pay- in addition to their regular substitute teaching for which they were paid. Applicants were expected to teach two years in the Akron city schools if appointed to such a position (Minutes of the Akron Board of Education 1897, 184; 1919, 213).

Diplomas were awarded upon satisfactory completion of work in the two departments of the normal school. Students were to average seventy-five percent between the two departments and not receive marks below seventy percent in either department. This diploma, issued by the city Board of Examiners, served as a certificate to teach in the Akron public schools as determined by the Board of Education (Minutes of the Akron Board of Education 1896, 158-160).

The normal school course was two years in length and consisted of a theory department and practice department. The students' first year of training was in the theory department where they received instruction in the elementary branches, general culture studies, nature work, form study, drawing, history, literature, methods, and psychology.

Second year students were in the practice department. There students prepared lessons and taught under the direction of the critic teacher and principal (Manual of the Board of Education 1900, 43).

By 1905 the Normal School course had been modified to cover four lines of work. These were educational psychology, history of education, general methods of teaching, theories of school management, and methods classes for primary, intermediate, and grammar school (Ibid.). A course of study was added which allowed college graduates to enter the second year of the normal school, complete their work, and graduate in one year (Rules and Regulations of the Board of Education 1900, 43-44).

By December of 1915 the Municipal University of Akron and the Akron school board formulated an agreement approved by the State School Commissioners for a combined course in normal training between the University and Perkins Normal School. This partnership was needed by the University to comply with new state mandates passed in 1914 by the legislature that required increased preparation in the area of professional education and supervised practice teaching for state certification. Two training courses were devised a four–year and five- year combination course. The four-year combination course enabled the graduates to teach as elementary teachers in the Akron city schools but not as high school teachers, however, they were entitled to a provisional state high school certificate which gave them the legal right to teach in any high school in the state of Ohio. Students attended the University for three years, completed the required work (103 semester hours) and entered Perkins Normal School to complete the practice training course. Students then received the Bachelor of Science in Education (Minutes of the Akron Board of Education 1915, 171-172).

The five–year combination course was offered to those who desired to be high school teachers in the Akron school system. The course candidate completed four years (128 semester hours) at the University, pursued a major in the subject he/she wished to teach, received their bachelor's degree, and spent a fifth year at Perkins Normal School in observation and practice teaching (Ibid.). In 1921 Perkins Normal School was merged into the Municipal University of Akron becoming a part of the University known as the Teachers College (Buchtelite 1921).

The work of the Teachers College was organized for the preparation and training of teachers for the Akron public school system, the professional improvement of teachers already engaged in the public school system, and the study of educational problems. Sessions of the Teachers College were held during the day, evening, and through the summer. The administration of the Teachers College was under the management of the President of the University and Superintendent of Schools (Trustee Minutes of the Municipal University of Akron 1923).

The teaching staff was college faculty who taught pre-service and public schoolteachers the various professional programs of the Teachers College. The Akron school board paid the salaries of all teachers of the College and the salaries of teachers in the summer session. The university furnished all required classroom and office space, equipment, light, heat, stenographic service printing, and bore the cost of instruction on purely collegiate, non-professional subjects (Ibid.).

Admission into the Teachers College was determined by examination, high school certificate, honorable dismissal from other colleges of universities, or if over twenty-one years of age as special students not in candidacy for a degree. Unconditional admittance

was granted to students with fifteen units of high school work (University of Akron 1922, 121-122).

Summer session programs were initiated June 1922. Offered were professional coursework and opportunities for practice teaching (Report of Sarah Stimmel University of Akron 1921/1922, 6-7). The observation and training experience of prospective teachers generally took place in the last year or two of the student's pre-service program. Schools were designated for observation and training work through out the system.

The training experience of the cadet teacher was completed in the public schools in regular schoolrooms under the supervision of critic teachers. Each elementary critic teacher supervised four student teachers. Each high school critic teacher supervised but one student teacher (The University of Akron 1922, 121-122).

Initially the Teachers College offered six courses for training teachers. These were three and four year preparation programs in kindergarten-primary education and elementary. Upon completion of their work students received either a state teachers certificate for completion of the three year program or a bachelor of education degree for work completed in the four year program (Municipal University of Akron 1922, 122-126).

In 1923 there were eight preparatory programs for teachers, by 1924 this had grown to thirteen courses of study. Courses leading to a master's degree were established during the 1923-1924 school year. In 1926 new courses were offered to teachers on commercial and vocational education. In the 1928-1929 school year the course work again expanded to include industrial education (Municipal University of Akron 1923, 129-140; 1924, 120-127; 1926, 118-128; University of Akron 1928/1929, 139).

By the 1927/1928 school year the coursework for high school teachers was slightly modified. Students were still required to complete five years of study, but now students had the option of completing their bachelor's work in either the Teacher's College or the College of Liberal Arts. If a bachelor's degree in secondary education was obtained through the Teachers College a fifth year of study was spent in the Teachers College completing coursework for a master's degree. If the student received a bachelor's degree from the College of Liberal Arts a fifth year of study in the Teachers College was required, and upon successful completion of this coursework received the bachelor of education degree (University of Akron 1927/1928, 130-140).

In order to gain a broader perspective of the Teachers College, three former students of the College were asked to recall their training at the College and their professional experience thereafter. Mrs. Margaret Brewster, a 1925 graduate of the Teachers College and a former kindergarten teacher had the distinction of serving as an observation teacher. Brewster recalled that students attended her class in pairs or small groups to observe her classroom techniques and participate in classroom activities under her supervision. Sadly enough when Brewster was pressed to offer her opinions on her work as an observation teacher, she stated she did not know why she was selected or why she was in the observation school. Brewster's teaching career spanned a few years ending when she married and had children. A second alumnus of the college was enrolled in the graduate program in art education. This teacher remembered she had not received any training in pedagogy or educational methods until she completed student teaching experience and observation work required by the College.

The third alumnus interviewed was Mrs. Helen Coup, a 1928 graduate of the Teachers College and a thirty-five year veteran of the Akron public schools. Coup's comments reflected the observations of the other College alumni, that the most important aspect of her training experience was the time spent in observation work and student teaching. Another observation by Coup was too much time was spent on academic matter and not enough time given to methods work. Interestingly enough educators still debate this issue of the why of knowledge over the how.

By June 1929 the Akron school board was considering a decision to withdraw their support from the Teachers College (Minutes Akron Board of Education 1929, 113-114; Minutes Trustees University of Akron 1929). The reasons for this were varied, but the economic depression of the 1930's was one factor. Other reasons considered by school board members were that with five state supported teacher-training institutions along with the normal school at Kent there was an adequate supply of teachers being prepared in Ohio and no need for the Akron Teachers College. Furthermore, the chief function of the school system was to prepare students at the elementary and secondary levels not at the level of teacher preparation. In January 1931 the Akron school board voted to officially terminate their financial support of the Teachers College by June 1,1931 (Akron Board of Education 1931, 28; Akron Beacon Journal 1931).

The pre-service training of nineteenth-century schoolteachers in Akron, Ohio progressed from teachers being awarded a diploma to receiving a university degree. Akron teachers first earned diplomas through the city normal school then progressed to attendance at the university Teachers College earning a bachelor's or master's degree in elementary or secondary education. These changes initiated by state mandates in teacher

certification laws, led to the creation of teacher preparatory programs administered by the city board of education and their university affiliate. Eventually the dual administration of the teachers college by the city school board and the university was dissolved, with the university assuming control over the teacher preparation program.

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